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FRANCIS McCOMAS, FROM CHARCOAL DRAWING
BY J. C. LEYENDECKER

SOME WATER-COLORS OF TO-MORROW

The love of nature, of truth, and of freedom is the ceaseless song of art. Through its harmony every age searches for new expression, a keener impetus for high aspirations, and withal its own poetry.

Not very long ago—it was, I think, among the last days of windy, shifting, though not quite graceless March—a young artist who had journeyed from California on his way to London and Paris, stopped a short time in Chicago, unpacked his wares, and gave all a chance to see what had been the trend of his interests as a painter. It was a pleasure to find that as a student of nature he had been held captive, and, too, that he had found, through the richly suggestive country his travels had taken him, varied and convincing ways of interpreting her. To his confrères and those who look for simple truths freshly conceived in any art, this positive charm and bigness proved most interestingly the breadth and vitality to be gained in the handling of water-colors.

These paintings by Francis McComas held a forceful vibrating note, the essence of nature and doubtless art's rarest possession carrying a strong melody of clear personal accent through a theme of varying moods and powers. Independence of expression, undisturbed by calculated system, rich, well-modulated color, and a sincere feeling

for decorative arrangement and balance, united these pictures most refreshingly. Add to these characteristics the interest of an unconventional choice in subject, and one has the keyboard of the young painter's impressions found in Australia, in Hawaii, and in California. His most complete compositions and the motives he developed with greatest enthusiasm represent the rolling country and big trees about Monterey. Sometimes he "starred" a rich green oak, then again the dramatic old cypress trees played their parts, imbued with the fantastic



THE ROBE OF MOUNT TAMALPAIS, BY FRANCIS MCCOMAS

poetry and ancient tone of their surroundings. Thus had they been significantly studied, and created the distinction of a minor harmony in a pattern of color strong and subtle.

Two of the largest studies, "The Robe of Mt. Tamalpais" and "Leona Oak Trees," which remain in Chicago to take their places in private collections, are very persuasive compositions. In both, the medium was handled with liberal understanding. The first is richly imaginative, intense in color and expression, absolute in value and quiet tone. Sometimes a brush seems to write as well as paint, and here the capricious changing lines mark a story of strange, deep fancies. The oaks are more impersonal, more definitely located, telling of the fine fresh country and the power and breadth of a fearless appreciation. It is rare to find in water-color painting the essential constructive masses resolved into fewer values. Such illumination, so

well considered to express the fullness of nature, creates a tone of light, color, and character.

In America there are many young bloods, painters and illustrators, who have the spirit to make our art a very vital one; their audacity is often so convincing that it seems quite discreet enough to be the better part of valor. Impersonality and lack of courage are really in art mediocrity and a hackneyed nothing. With control and the added convictions of experience, merits of strong impulse and charm-



THE LEONA OAK TREES, BY FRANCIS McCOMAS

ing freedom develop worthy and lasting results — the stronghold of a well determined expression.

To those who truly seek there is much to find; but the glitter of all-absorbing Paris, the confusion of many methods of art, and not least, the power of Whistler's name, suggest, perhaps, the fabled spider and his alluring web. So when the youth and vigor of our land carry their artistic hopes to the other side, it must not be that at the end they are left, like the spider's little guests, shorn of their wings of purpose and independent fancy.

M. K.